

CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUIT-SPONSORED HOUSES AND CENTERS. A FIRST DRAFT

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Introduction: Each morning, the secretariat presented orally and in print a summary of discussions. It drew on the reports from the Colleagues Groups and from the Ministry Groups and included the plenary discussions. These summaries aimed first at keeping discussion focused. But they also make a broadly inclusive indication of what was being thought about and said. Of course, many other matters were mentioned and some important ones could not be attended to during a week. The paragraphs here can be taken as a fair indication of the thrust of the consultation's work but ought not be considered an official report.

The Present Ministry of Exercises

As a whole, the ministry of Exercises flourishes in many ways apart from retreat houses and spirituality centers. It invites collaboration between Jesuits and laity and it is thoroughly ecumenical.

The whole ministry is postulated on the conviction that the Exercises respond to the local churches' needs in a unique way. The people of the Church need meaning and a life-purpose which will support faith in the pain and sufferings of life. They need a deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They need community in the church and in secular society, to make visible the invisible. They need a nurturing of faith that leads to meaningful celebration of sacraments and involvement in a parish.

How is the ministry of Exercises responding? It responds by adapting to different realities – sociopolitical, ecclesiastical, cultural, and even

economic. It responds in exercises that go beyond just resolving personal problems, self-realization, and introspection – to a sociopolitical option and to an open-ing to others. And the ministry is responding by forming Jesuits and laity in mutual collaboration. It is empowering the laity and creating lay leaders, great needs of all local churches.

Houses and Centers

The Society sponsors about 250 houses and centers. Almost without exception, they have a staff of both Jesuits and laity, a notable characteristic.

The established retreat houses rarely offer only Ignatian Exercises in silence, as they have transformed themselves into centers. The teams do not just wait for people to come to make Spiritual Exercises, but offer other kinds of spiritual activities: courses to learn how to pray, courses on personal growth and maturation, programs for guides and leaders, and so on.

Centers of Ignatian Spirituality, situated for the most part in the middle of the city, offer a great range of spiritual activities and reach out to the surrounding city.

The Jesuit-sponsored house and center both applies and adapts the Spiritual Exercises.

Applying the Exercises means that the one who gives them has personally experienced the full Exercises, and knows the pedagogy, dynamic, inner process of the Exercises. When one is serious about giving the authentic experience, one knows and keeps looking into Master Ignatius' text. He or she guides exercitants through the full authentic experience, expecting them to have the appropriate dispositions.

Adapting the Exercises means doing what Master Ignatius did: He chose some parts of this experience and left others aside. He describes this in Annotation 18. There, he gives a sketch of a way of living a Christian life which we ought to call "Ignatian." What is it? It includes the Principle and Foundation, the examen, prayer on human sin and God's loving mercy, some meditations on Jesus' life, some simple ways of praying and (we choose to think) some elements of five sets of rules: the rules for

discernment of the First Week, for eating, for giving alms and lifestyle, for handling scruples or perfectionism, and *Sentire*.

Applying the Full Exercises

We apply Exercises in a variety of ways, faithful to the text but at the same time listening creatively and discerning movements, and attending to the intimate process that each exercitant goes through. Characteristically, a Jesuit-sponsored house offers the thirty-day retreat. Many give Exercises in three or four stages (etapas) over months or years. Most centers and many houses offer the full Exercises in daily life during 6, 12, or even 24 months.

All seem to apply the Exercises as a way of making better decisions. Some apply even the full Exercises as a school of prayer or as a deeper way of knowing Christ. At least in some regions, guides apply the 30-day retreat mostly to religious and to clergy. We also give them as a way of developing lay leaders (as we have given them to form Jesuits). All of these applications are considered successful.

The 30-day retreat is less helpful to laity than the retreat in stages (etapas), or than the Annotation 19 Exercises in Daily Life, which seem to have a special value because they are brought so close to the person's real self and life.

The numbers making the long retreat, at least in some regions, have declined after the initial enthusiasm and few lay people make it. Seminarians who now come to make it present issues of freedom, openness, and preparation. We are learning that we need to be more discerning about whom we invite to make Exercises. Selection and preparation are crucial and are part of the Ignatian characteristics.

What do people seek in making the full exercises? Some, but not many, come to make an election (e.g., take vows or be ordained). Some come to confirm an election that is already made or to reform their life by deepening their faith in Christ. Certain groups have characteristic aims, such as novices and religious under obligation. Certain life situations move both laity and Jesuits to make full Exercises, such as a life transition, or some urgent problem, or some painful, traumatic experience.

Others come with broader aims in making full Exercises. They come

to integrate life, to be more free with God, to encounter Jesus and know him better, to confront brokenness and find wholeness. Some come to renew their interior life or to find a sense of direction and more clarity. Some guides judge that, where these broader aims move the Exercises, Annotation 19 exercises seem to serve better than the long retreat.

Experiencing the full Exercises offers space to connect to the institutional church. Some do not know what they come for. The young present a special case, in their search for self and for authenticity. More mature people have clearer ideas about what they expect. Basically, all are asking, What does God want me to do?

Adapting the Exercises

We adapt the Exercises to the preached weekend retreat, first of all. We give directed retreats of five days, often focused mainly on the Principle and Foundation and Week I, and at times including the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We consider the one-to-one eight-day retreat an adaptation, not an application, and give it in many different ways other than the Weeks. We give Exercises in Daily Life to groups during seven or eight months or more, and include sharing and additional input such as the *Autobiography*. This is a characteristic adaptation of Annotation 19. Even in guiding people through the residential 30-day retreat, which includes all four Weeks, we may not take them through the full dynamic or pedagogy, and we consider this an adaptation, too. We are also adapting Annotation 18 Exercises by giving them one-to-one in characteristic ignatian fashion. For Ignatian guides, this means that they listen to people tell their experience, identify where God is in it, and then give the appropriate help from the Exercises.

These adapted exercises often, and importantly, integrate faith-sharing. Specific forms of adaptation are the Kairos retreats and the pre-Cana retreats, and exercises for specific groups of people. All of these adaptations, we tend to consider as preparation to making the full Exercises. The Exercises in Daily Life sometimes weave in psychological helps, sometimes add week-end experiences, and sometimes are given in a group – all of which have proven helpful. Group retreats have been quite successful, particularly with the young. About applying the full Exercises in a group,

some feel hesitations or have doubts.

What do people seek in making the adapted exercises? People seek not primarily conversion in these adapted Exercises, though some want to be challenged, but rather a good spiritual experience and consolation. Some want confirmation of life choices or to deal with problems or traumatic experiences. Positively, they look to find God's will, some new direction, and a deeper integration of faith and life. They want to be renewed and to have an intuitive understanding of Jesus' teaching.

Characteristically, Ignatian guides feel that adapting must begin with finding out what people need, both as individuals and as groups. With individuals, hearing their life-story tells what parts of Exercises to adapt for them.

Whom Do Houses and Centers Serve?

Houses and centers serve those who need conversion. They are not, characteristically, simply houses of prayer and recollection. We understand conversion as taking responsibility for oneself in concrete matters in each of the realms of human experience: religious, moral, affective, intellectual, and social-political.

Who need conversion? Faithful people in the church, the parishioners, need to be more involved in and responsible for the Church, itself, with all the conversions that would require. All the faithful – but Ignatian leaders in particular – need to become involved in politics to bring a positive influence to bear both on events and on governments' structures. Social activists need ongoing conversion, especially those who are driven more by an ideology than by a realistic assessment of their world (this would begin with an intellectual conversion). Jesuits need social-political conversion and affective conversion (especially toward the poor), to overcome individualism. They and perhaps all Ignatian colleagues need moral conversion to be able to work in teams. As we perceive them – even in our different and varied backgrounds – politicians, journalists, and diocesan clergy stand out.

The Kinds Conversion. The Exercises offer a multiple, integrated, and inte-

grating conversion. Currently, Ignatian directors tend to put surprising emphasis on social-political conversion: for Christians, parishioners, politicians, Jesuits and laity. As a matter of course, Exercises also emphasize moral conversion and religious conversion. Affective conversion seems urgent among priests and clergy. It is also needed among all peoples because their *sentire* – their feeling about the Church – is determined by a distorted model or paradigm. Affective and other conversions are needed by those who are “devout,” but who do nothing to serve others; affective conversion is needed by non-believers. Personal-moral conversion – and this is characteristic of present Ignatian spirituality – needs to be integrated with social-political conversion.

The Outcomes of Making Exercises. First of all the characteristic outcomes is this one: people develop a personal relationship with Jesus which reveals the truth about their deeper (perhaps hidden, and perhaps unknown) self. And as one grows aware of self and Jesus, one finds oneself in a new relationship with Jesus, with self, and with others. More simply, at the personal level, the Exercises help one know that “God loves me and I am important because I am beloved of God.”

At the social level, the Exercises help people to reconciliation, even where revenge and violence prevail. They show that a community of believers in the church is possible.

The full Exercises bring one to experience Christ as a model who made his choice in perfect freedom (the fullness of love), notwithstanding the consequences. Entering the Gospel narrative in the Exercises will inevitably lead the exercitant to the Cross. The Exercises powerfully bring one to hear the challenge: Who do you say that I am?

Characteristic Material: Uniquely, the Gospels

The Exercises bring one into a unique encounter with the living Word of God, the Gospels, filling one with hope for the Kingdom. The Principle and Foundation holds out the fundamental myth (giving appreciation of the reality of one’s world as Jesus sees it) and the Weeks provide the parable (which challenge the evils in one’s life world).

The situation in different regions is that too many people do not know

the Gospels, others need help to avoid an over-literal reading of them, and many have no clear image of the person of Jesus. Everywhere, we need to offer a longer preparation for Exercises by applying Annotation 18, week-end retreats, and so on. We need an updated Christology and we need to form directors in it, so that the Gospels can help people confront themselves with Jesus Christ's way of being.

The Spiritual Exercises help fill this need, for they are a way into the oral narrative of the gospels – completely characteristic of the Exercises – and present the person of Jesus as he appeared in Galilee in his humanity. The Exercises work in human ways – the composition of place and the petition “id quod volo” bring the whole person into this way of knowing Christ. They invite one to jump into the Gospels.

Concisely, the Exercises help the person to identify more concretely what it is to live like Christ. They directly challenge one to conversion and commitment to Jesus. The Exercises, as they draw one to be more like Jesus of Nazareth, open one to deeper knowledge of Jesus who is the Christ.

Relationships in the exercises. The Exercises draw one into the mystery of Jesus' life in the gospels. They do not put knowledge in the brain but in the heart. They create a relationship to the community of disciples of Christ as brothers and sisters and as members of the Church. They draw one into deeper relationships:

— To the Father: through the experience of God's unconditional love, which also makes one's relationship with oneself more profound, the Father is “de-mystified” and an intimate relationship with the One Who IS becomes possible.

— To Jesus Christ: The fundamental relationship in Exercises is with Jesus of Nazareth, who incarnates our relationship to the Father and to the Spirit. Exercises transform one into Jesus' likeness, making one ‘Son’ like Him.

— To the Spirit, who acts throughout Exercises, creating in one the gift of a relationship with the Father like Jesus – a relationship of absolute trust, true obedience, and passionate love. Mary is somehow connected with the Spirit, and the characteristic triple colloquy is important.

— The Spirit brings the gospel into one's own life story.

The Ministry of Jesuit-sponsored Houses and Centers

The members of Jesuit-sponsored houses and centers may well need ongoing moral and affective conversion to succeed as a community-like team. They will need ongoing social-political conversion because of the Company's fundamental option for the poor. Jesus interacted with his own culture and with the Roman oppressors. As directors and team-members of institutions with civil standing, we also interact with the culture and whatever in it oppresses.

Our ministry is to bring Christ to our world, a "spiritual ministry," certainly, but a ministry linked, bound up with, and tangled in the secular world around us. One obvious reason is that we have to keep the water and electricity coming in, and wind and rain out, of the buildings. But there are others, subtler: As Jesus gathered disciples, we have to gather colleagues and helpers, Jesuit and lay. As Jesus gathered crowds, we gather retreatants and participants. As Jesus related to authorities, civil and religious, so have we to relate to authorities. Holding in mind our evangelical purposes, we face some hard-edged questions, one of the first of which has to do with finding the money to support this spiritual ministry.

Supports for this Ministry. The more outstanding financial supports come from provinces, endowments, and programs that produce income. To these would be added the contributions of retreatants (we ask them to help, tell them what the cost is, and ask them to go beyond it if they can). Important support comes from creating attractive programs and even well-focused centers such as the "faith and culture" centers.

Publicity and promotion are indispensable supports. Sound management and financing, preserving what we have and making our houses attractive places to stay, have to underpin all other supports. Boards of directors or advisors (characteristically combining Jesuits and laity) contribute strongly. And benefactors have helped importantly.

Contacting parishes and dioceses and collaborating with other Jesuit institutions promotes the ministry. Volunteers work in the houses or centers and bring others to their programs, and networks are a great support. The “captain system” works very well in some places.

The ministry needs greater Jesuit support — to help with personal spiritual resources and to help the Church’s responsiveness to lay potential. And it needs greater lay support — so that the laity as a whole can execute well their increasing involvement in church leadership. The ministry needs Jesuits, religious, and laity to form those who will have to carry on the Ignatian ministry which has so far been heavily Jesuit work. And the ministry needs more younger Jesuits.

Two temptations need to be avoided. One is to do everything just to fill the beds or the chairs. The other is to ignore the need of marketing.

All of these matters are said in the understanding that Jesuits and laity are collaborating in support of this spiritual ministry.

It is characteristic of the Jesuit-sponsored houses and centers that this col-laboration reaches even into defining what are authentic Spiritual Exercises.

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